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Urban peripheries and rural centres – adolescent dialect use in superdiverse Denmark

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Processes of dialect levelling are generally conceived as counter to and incompatible with processes of dialect vitality (e.g. Sandøy & Kristiansen 2010; Maegaard et al. 2009). However, recent studies indicate that both processes may take place simultaneously in a language community (Monka 2013; Johnstone 2010). As pointed out by Johnstone (2004), globalisation may produce both dialect loss and renewed dialect awareness and dialect use. In this paper, we address young people's use of regional dialect in the Danish speech community, which on the one hand is characterized by a high degree of language standardization and levelling (e.g. Pedersen 2003), and on the other of globalization and superdiversity (Vertovec 2007). In the paper, we present early results of a comparative study of dialect use among adolescents in two parts of Denmark: a rural, traditional dialect speaking village and an urban, superdiverse suburb. We find that in both communities the deployment of dialect serves a range of purposes among adolescents. In Vollsmose, an ethnically mixed suburb of the town of Odense, speakers use a distinct multiethnic youth style parallel to what has been described for young people in Copenhagen (e.g. Quist 2008; Madsen 2012). Occasionally, this style is combined with features (mostly prosodic, but also phonetic) associated with the regional Funen dialect. In Bylderup, a rural village in the Southern part of Denmark, we find that the young people employ traditional Southern Jutlandic dialect for different purposes and to varying degrees. On the basis of examples of situated dialect use, we discuss the different values and statuses of dialect in the two settings. Methodically, the study includes 70 9th graders in public schools and draws on ethnographic participant observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews.

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